Imam al-Jawad's Spiritual Advice to One of His Companions

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This paper is a brief explanation of one narration by the ninth imam, Imam al-Jawad (a), wherein a man asks him for advice, and the Imam advises him to five things: to rely on patience, welcome poverty, abandon desires and whims, and to have God-wariness.

Person Tags:

Imam Muhammad al-Taqi al-Jawad [10]

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Abstract

It was not unusual for laypeople to approach the Prophet Muhammad and the infallible Imams for advice during life's ups and downs, and on their journey to God. Receiving good advice helps us learn much about life and how to wisely approach any bumps on the road and to avoid mistakes. It also motivates people to put these thoughts and ideas into action. This paper is a brief explanation of one narration by

the ninth imam, Imam al-Jawad (a), wherein a man asks him for advice, and the Imam advises him to five things: to rely on patience, welcome poverty, abandon desires and whims, and to have God-wariness.

Those who approached the Messenger of Allah and the Imams asked them for advice to tread the path of spiritual journey and mystical elevation and could enjoy special Divine mercy by virtue of the Infallibles' wise words and light.

Advice plays an important part in our lives. Imam al-Jawad said, *"The believer needs God's support, cautiousness, and advice from others."*1

Imam al-Baqir also said, *"The one for whom Allah has not made an admonisher from within him, people's advice will not benefit him."*2 In other words, the believers take advice only when they admonish themselves first; they are aware of their own faults before others.

In the book Isharat (Sermon on the Mystics' Ranks), when Avicenna tried to rationalize mysticism, he said that the advice given eloquently by a righteous admonisher can play an important role in making the carnal soul obedient to the peaceful soul.3

Imam al-Jawad's Advice

A man told the 9th Imam, *"Give me a piece of advice."* Imam al-Jawad said, *"Will you take it?"* He responded, *"Yes, of course."* The Imam said, *"Rely on patience, welcome poverty, abandon carnal desires, and oppose whims. Know that Allah sees you, so be careful about how you act."*4

In this pearl of wisdom, Imam al-Jawad mentions five moral principles:

1. Patience

Every moment of the believer's spiritual journey toward moral perfection takes form through patience in such a way that the farther he gets away from patience, the more imperfect his actions become. Hence, Imam al-Jawad said, *"Make patience your cushion* [*rely on patience*]*."* This metaphor refers to the fact that when one wants to rest, he leans on the cushion. Likewise, a believer needs patience to rely on to have peace of mind.

When the Prophet was asked, *"What is faith?"* he replied, *"Patience."*5

Also, according to Imam Ali, the way to the attainment of proximity to God is patience. He said, *"Whoever practices patience* [*in order to reach God's proximity*]*, he will attain it."*6 Therefore, patience in all its forms [e.g., to avoid sins and in afflictions] is the best way for faith to flourish.

2. Poverty

Among the issues that lower self-esteem or disrupt a believer's spiritual journey are poverty and financial problems. The Imam said, *"O believer! Hug* [*welcome*] *poverty."*

In other words, if one tolerates poverty, his self-esteem is boosted, and poverty will not prevent the mystical wayfarer's moral perfection.

According to the Divine wisdom and Islamic teachings given to us by the Ahlul Bayt, this sentence can be interpreted differently. That is, the mystical wayfarer is "by nature" poor compared to God, Who is "by nature" all-Rich. Accordingly, he considers himself needy, so he becomes cleansed of obstinacy and self-conceit. Imam Ali's prayer in the Kufa mosque also indicates this: *"O my Lord! You are self-sufficient, and I am poor; and who has mercy on the poor except the self-sufficient?"*[7]

3. Refraining from carnal desires

A main principle in moral perfection is performing deeds void of carnal desires. Carnal desires involve selfishness and egotism and prevent man from acquiring true Divine teachings, while the believer's security lies in his treading the Divine path. Thus, Imam al-Jawad said in his advice, *"Abandon carnal desires."* In other words, the basis of a believer's actions is God's orders not his carnal desires.

4. Opposing whims

The most difficult step in the acquisition of moral virtues is the struggle against whims. The Prophet made it clear by calling the struggle against whims *"The Greater Jihad."*[8] This issue is so important that he also said, *"Your greatest enemy is your whims within you."*[9]

In another hadith, the Prophet referred to the struggle against one's ego as the most virtuous struggle, saying, *"The best jihad is to struggle against your ego and whims for the sake of Allah, the Almighty."*[10]

In this regard, Imam Ali said, *"The first thing you dislike about jihad is to fight against your ego."*[11]

Thus, the opposition to carnal desires and abandonment of whims pave the way for attaining proximity of God.

5. Being in God's presence

The most important thing for the spiritual wayfarer is to not neglect for a moment the fact that he is always in the presence of God, Who sees his actions. Imam al-Jawad said, *"Know that you are seen by Allah, so be careful about your actions."*

Regarding this, Imam Khomeini said, *"The world is considered the presence of God; do not commit sins*

in His presence." Thus, a factor in committing sins is the neglect of one's being in God's presence.

The spiritual wayfarer should get help from mystical contemplation, a practice by mystics who consider it a means of salvation and necessity in the spiritual journey; they constantly feel themselves in God's presence everywhere and under any circumstances to keep away from negligence which prepares the ground for committing sins.

Imam al-Sadiq told Ishaq ibn 'Ammar:
*"O Ishaq! Fear Allah as if you saw Him even though He might not see you. Of course, if you believe He does not see you, no doubt you have associated somebody else with Him. And if you know He sees you, and then you commit sins in His presence, undoubtedly you consider Him the most valueless observer."*12

O Lord! Let me know Your light and bestow upon me Your light-creating beauty.

O' Lord! When You are present, who else should I seek? And now that You are the observer, what should I say?13

1. Tuhaf-ul-'Oqul, Ibn Shu'bah Harrani, corrected by Ali Akbar Ghaffari, translated by Ayatullah Kamare'i, the Association of Seminary Teachers, Qum, the 2nd ed., 4041 A.H., p. 754.
المؤمن يحتاج إلى توفيق من الله و واعظ من نفسه و قبول ممّن ينصحه
2. Tuhaf-ul-'Oqul, Ibn Shu'bah Harrani, p.302.
و قال عليه السّلام من لم يجعل الله له من نفسه واعظا فإنَ مواعظ النّاس لن تغنى عنه شيأ
3. Sharh-ul-Isharat wa a-Tanbihat, Khajeh Nasir-u-Din al-Tusi, researched by Hassanzadeh Amuli, Bustane Ketab Publications, Qom, the 1st ed., 1383 solar, the 2nd ed., p. 1054.
4. Bihar-ul-Anwar, All□mah Majlisi, Dar-ul-Ihya-a-Turath, Beirut, 1403, A.H., vol.75, p. 358.
قال للجواد عليه السّلام رجل: أوصنى قال عليه السّلام , و تقبل ؟ قال : نعم قال عليه السّلام : توسّد الصّبر و اعتنق الفقر و ارفض الشّهوات و خالف الهوى و اعلم أنك لن تخلو من عين الله فانظر كيف تكون
5. Mizan-ul-Hikmah, Muhammad Muhammadi Rey-Shahri, translated by Hamid-Rida Shaikhi, 9731, the 2nd ed., 690, p.2958.
6. Bihar-ul-Anwar, vo. 71, p. 90. من صبر على الله و صل اليه
7. Mafatih-ul-Jinan, the acts in the Great Mosque of Kufa, Imam Ali's prayer, published in Nobugh Publications, p. 707.
مولاى يا مولاى ! انت الغنى و انا الفقير و هل يرحم الفقير الّا الغنيّ
8. Jami' al-Saghir, Jalal-u-Din Suyuti, corrected by Ahmad Sa'd Ali, Cairo, 1373 A.H., the 4th ed., vol. 2, p. 85.
9. Bihar-ul-Anwar, vo. 68, p. 64. أعدى عدوّك نفسك الّتى بين جنبيك
10. Mizan-ul-Hikmah, Muhammad Muhammadi Rey-Shahri, vol. 2, p.854.
افضل الجهاد أن تجاهد نفسك و هواك فى ذات الله تعالى
11. ibid., vol. 2, pp. 850-851. اوّل ما تنكرون من الجهاد , جهاد أنفسكم آخر ما تفقدون مجاهدة أهوئكم و طاعة اولى الأمر منكم
12. Osul Kafi, Kulayni, corrected by Hassanzadeh Amuli, Maktaba-tul-Islamiyyah, Tehran, 1388 A.H., vol. 2, p. 55.
يا إسحاق خف الله كأنك تراه و إن كنت لا تراه فانّه يراك فان كنت ترى أنّه لا يراك فقد كفرت و إن كنت تعلم أنّه يراك ثمّ برزت له بالمعصية فقد جعلته من أهون النّاظرين عليك
13. Elahi-Nameh, Hassanzadeh Amuli, the 1st ed., Bustane Ketab, pp.3, 4.

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[1] https://www.al-islam.org/user/login?destination=node/48364%23comment-form
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[5] https://www.al-islam.org/person/mahboobeh-morshedian
[6] https://www.al-islam.org/library/12-imams
[7] https://www.al-islam.org/library/ethics
[8] https://www.al-islam.org/library/general-spirituality-philosophy
[9] https://www.al-islam.org/journals/vol-17-no-4-winter-2017
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